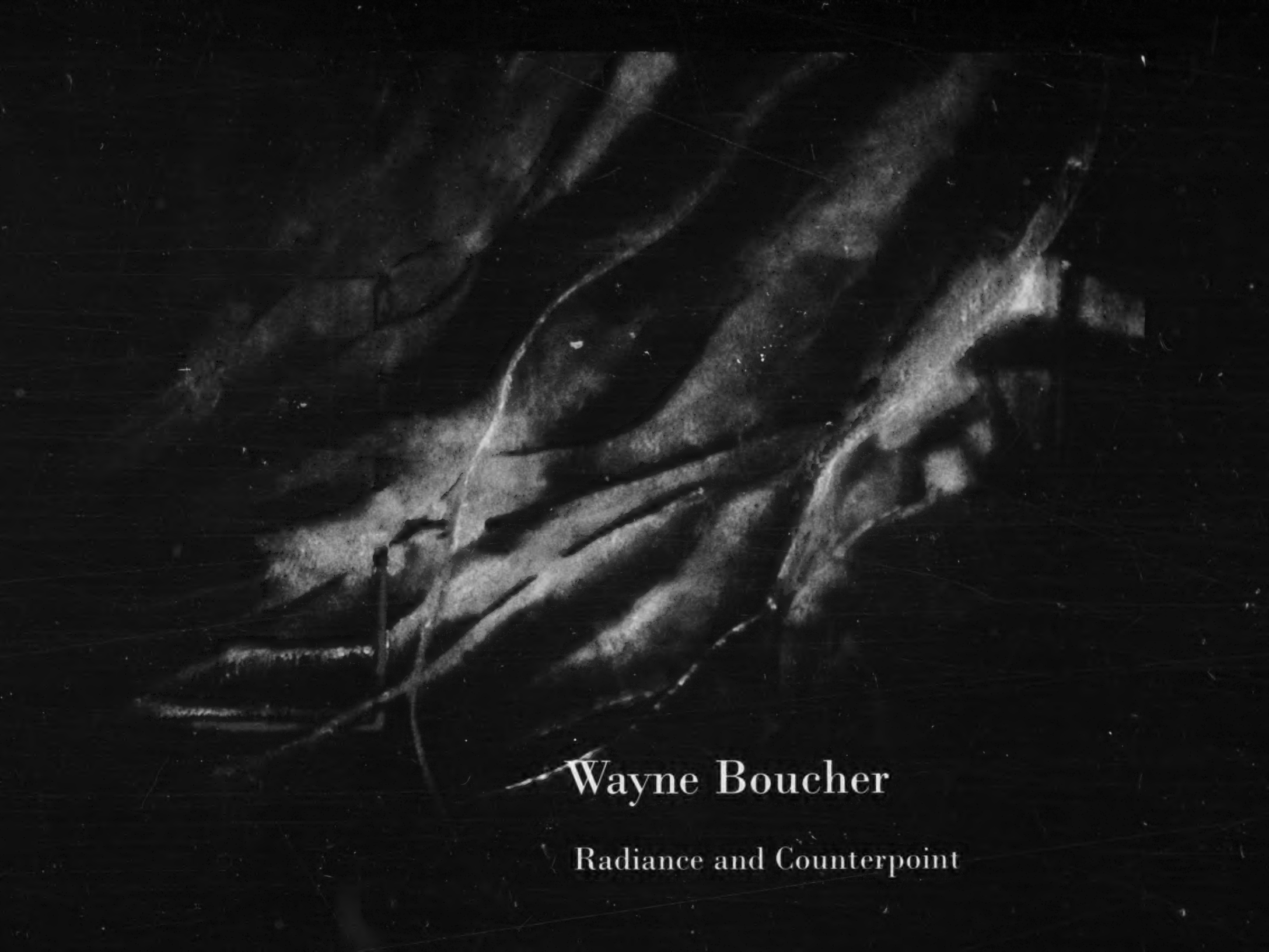


Wayne Boucher

Radiance and Counterpoint

Wayne Boucher

Radiance and Counterpoint

Art Gallery *of* Nova Scotia

Central Guaranty Trust Gallery
in Memory of Henry B Rhude (1)
1 September - 22 October 2006

Curated by Peter Dykhuis

2007-05596/

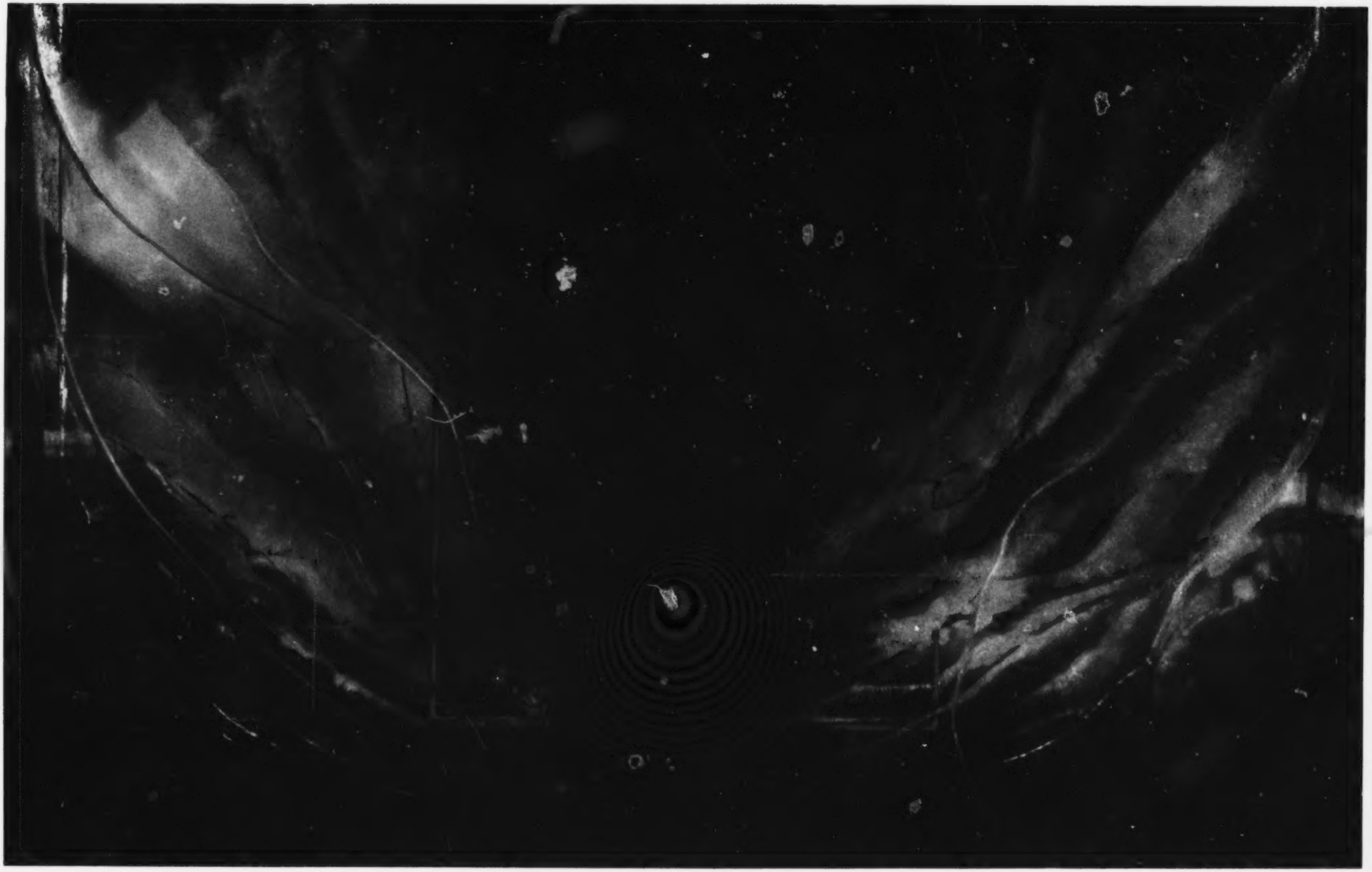
Foreword

The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is proud to be hosting the exhibition Wayne Boucher: Radiance and Counterpoint at both of our locations: Halifax and Yarmouth. This project has been many years in the development and there are many people to acknowledge. First and foremost I would like to thank the artist, Wayne Boucher, for his patience and professionalism.
I would also like to thank Peter Dykhuis, our guest curator for this project, for so ably steering it to completion. This exhibition could not have been possible without the graciousness of the lenders to it, and I wish to acknowledge all of them with thanks. Many people here at AGNS have contributed their usual professionalism and enthusiasm to this project, and I also wish to acknowledge the great work of Semaphor Design for the catalogue design and photography for this beautiful publication. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the ongoing support to AGNS and its programmes by the Province of Nova Scotia and the Canada Council for the Arts.

The mandate of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia is to bring the art of the world to Nova Scotia, and the art of Nova Scotia to the world. This exciting project is part of that mission, and continues our commitment to exhibiting the contemporary art of this province, and of this region.

Ray Cronin
Acting Senior Curator and
Curator of Contemporary Art

Cotton Candy 2005



Blue 2006

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I was not prepared for just how spectacular the view was at the crest of Parker Mountain Road as my car completed the ascent from Annapolis Royal. It was a warm day in early spring. The near Fundy Shore was clear and the New Brunswick coastline, distant on the horizon, was broken up in the haze and scud-cloud sky. Blue light and scattered colours bounced wildly in the atmosphere; the lay of the land read as an open book through the bare ridges of trees.

The purpose of my trip was to visit Wayne's studio, which is in a classroom of an old village schoolhouse with a wall of windows overlooking the Bay. Upon entering it, I was mesmerized by the panorama of sea and sky and stood transfixed in the window. It took a few minutes to break away; I had to remind myself that I had come here to look at Wayne's new paintings, not the ever-changing atmospheres, colours and peek-a-boo horizons in far-shore fog banks that compelled me to keep looking out of the window. Wayne, recognizing my quandary, admitted that he, too, often had to tear himself away from the window and return his concentration back into the frames of stretched canvas mounted on his studio walls.

On my second visit to Wayne's studio, now in early summer, I wanted to be dazzled by the vista that awaited me over the crest of the North Mountain. But conditions were radically different. All of the trees were bursting with foliage after a long, wet spring. The atmosphere was lightly overcast and hazy. The horizon dissolved into a wall of glowing blue-gray light framed by a green curtain of roadside trees. As I started my descent to the Fundy Shore, all perspective was lost. There was no depth to the glowing bluish light mass, just a blur of radiant space framed by foliage and the windshield of my car. Only the road created a linear reference point into the distance as it descended between the trees. The experience suddenly reminded me of Wayne's paintings. Was this it, the 'eureka' moment of understanding his work by experiencing the pictorial space on Parker Mountain Road that was part of Wayne's daily drive to the studio?

Fall 2003

Maybe, but...

Tattoo 2005

From a curatorial point of view, that would be too easy. Of course the immediate physical environment impacts an artist's perceptions of the world, but not all artists, even those who make 'abstract' paintings, simply quote the visual codification of local spatial experiences. There is always more to the story.

Boucher's work is deeply informed by the historical and critical paths of painting in the late 20th Century. He exhibits in his beloved and remarkably sophisticated small-town community of Annapolis Royal, but fully engages with communities in larger urban centres of Canada, the United States and recently in Germany. Following a trail blazed in the 1950s by American abstract painters such as Robert Motherwell, Clyfford Still, Helen Frankenthaler, Mark Rothko and Canadians such as Paul Emile Borduas, Yves Gaucher and Graham Coughtry, Boucher continues to investigate personal gestures and colour zones that turbocharge new, abstract, painterly spaces and vocabularies. Yet over the decades, Boucher's abstract canvases have evolved into sophisticated representations of optical space that are more relevant to current digital cultural than to an ethos begun with Cold War-era Abstract Expressionism. The gestures and marks, the figure/ground relationships, the complex layering of colour and textures all quote the heritage of late Modernist abstract painting. But his spatial constructions generate optical depths of field through three-dimensional modeling of colour with floating lines that reflect visual perceptions shaped by the computer window and camera framing. His paintings always reconcile a relationship to the edge and are about multiple 'somethings' without resorting to representational description.

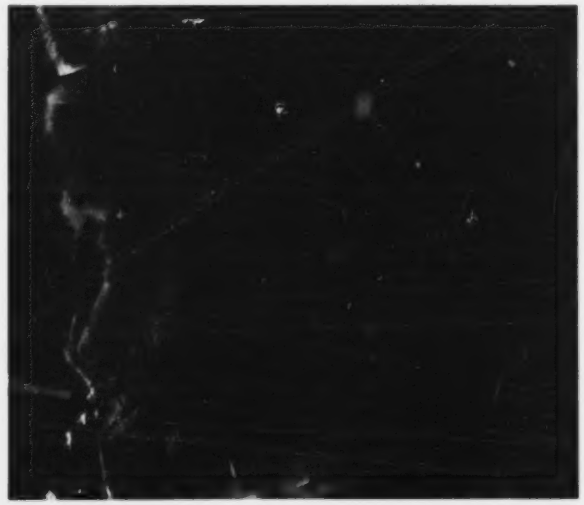
During discussions of compositional decisions made within his paintings, Boucher often used the term 'counterpoint.' For every large painterly field of colour there was a small point, a slender line, a hotspot, a textural pattern that held the larger, radiantly colourful space in check. This balancing act and spatial conversation has become foundational within his practice and an operative metaphor within this curatorial project.

*****

* * * * *

Wayne was born in Ontario and moved to Nova Scotia in the early 1970s. After a few years of unfulfilling business-related employment, Wayne pursued his interests in visual arts by enrolling at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, graduating with a BFA in 1975. Shortly after, he moved with his partner, Terry Roscoe, to Graywood outside of Annapolis Royal where they raised three daughters in an inexpensively purchased house on 25 acres of land. He continued to live in the Annapolis Royal community and, as with many artists from this era, benefited from the cheaper housing and the supportive cultural community that allowed him an economically viable vocation as an artist. Between production grants, sales of artwork and a flexible pool of part-time jobs, a steady income was possible that could also provide Wayne with the elusive goal constantly sought by artists: time in the studio.

Living where he did permitted Wayne more spacious studios than most urban artists, and thus enabled him to produce large paintings, with recent works measuring up to 2 meters x 3 1/2 meters. Indeed, the sheer volume of Wayne's production over the past few decades, combined with the physical size of many of his works, made it impossible to mount a full retrospective within the confines of the gallery space available for this exhibition. What this exhibition called for instead was a careful selection of paintings from the past few years that made chronological sense. Considering that Wayne produced works in small series with their titles often providing the clues as to their interrelationships (for example, *Above*, *Below* and *Between*), a smart linear progression of works from the past few years seemed completely possible.



Shelter 2006

Then again...

Just because paintings line up chronologically does not mean that they make optical or aesthetic sense when side-by-side. Colour, the first and most evident feature in Boucher's work, is not always employed from painting to painting in orderly, systematic applications. Each painting has internal colour logic, a push-pull of under-paint and veiled topcoat with colours that do not always resolve in the same chromatic family.

A chronology also implies that works were completed in a linear fashion even if multiple paintings were in production within the studio. Boucher, however, preferred to keep paintings 'in play' over long periods of time by exploring new visual elements; indeed, a 'finished' painting might be unrecognizable later on due to additional layers of colour and painterly gestures. Or a 'new' work, curiously familiar, turns out to be a previous canvas flipped 180° and compositionally reworked. Or the visible evidence of a mark-gesture from a recognized mid-'90s work was now peeking through the bottom of a 'new' painting overworked on a dormant canvas recycled from deep storage.

In other words, with the emotive presence of colour that operates as the signature component in Boucher's vocabulary, it seemed most illuminating to organize his work along families of colour. In doing so, a rough chronology was established that reflected Boucher's evolution over the past decade. Referring back to his foundational use of blue in his 1995 exhibition at Dalhousie Art Gallery in Halifax titled Surfacing, Boucher revealed that the green canvases were developments of modulations in the blue zones. His red and yellow paintings emerged from the blue-green canvases as many of the hot, red-orange-yellow marks, lines and spots that operated as figures on his blue grounds switched places. Boucher's shift to pinky-lilac hues is a recent expansion of the red series of works.

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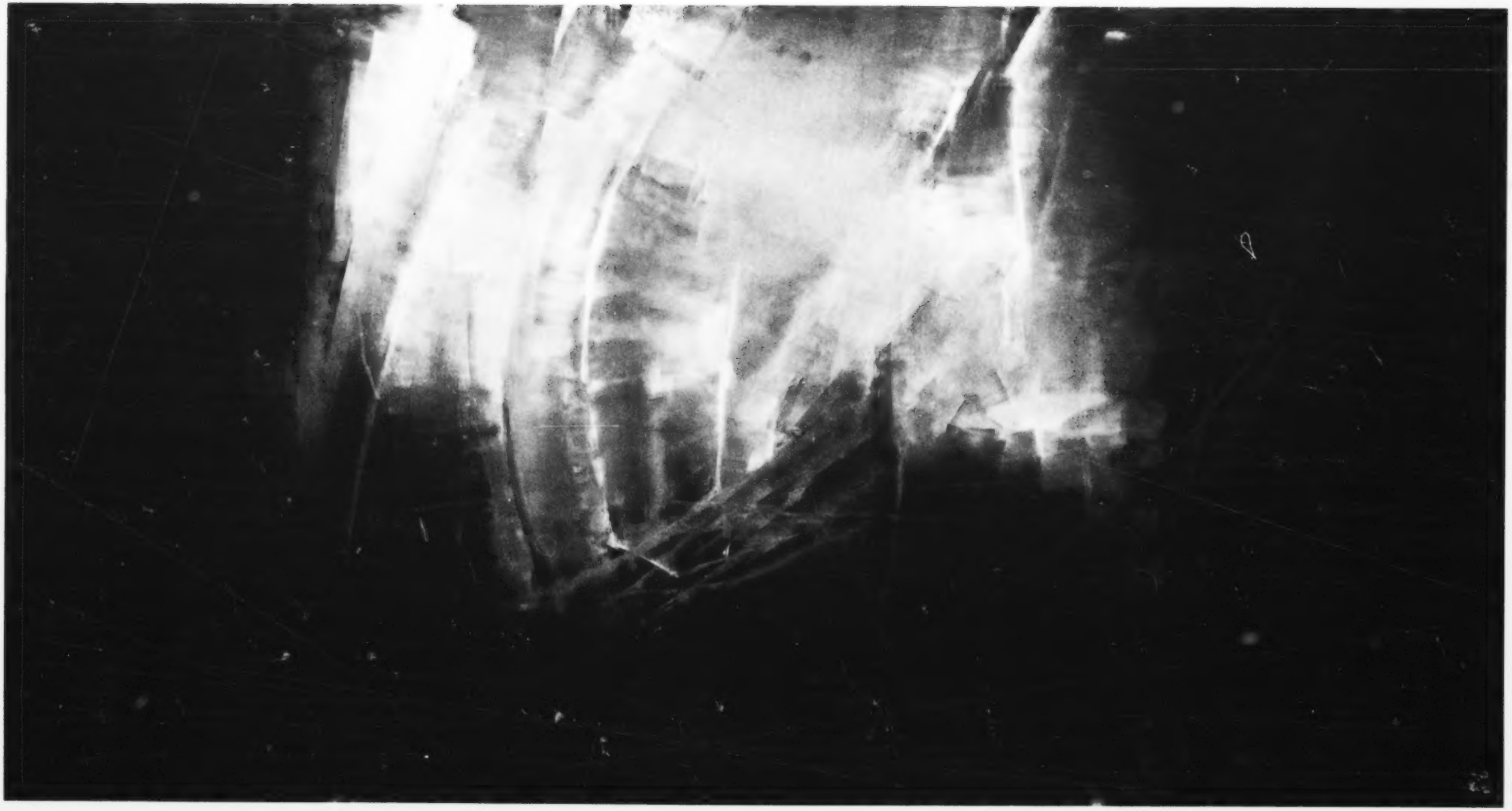
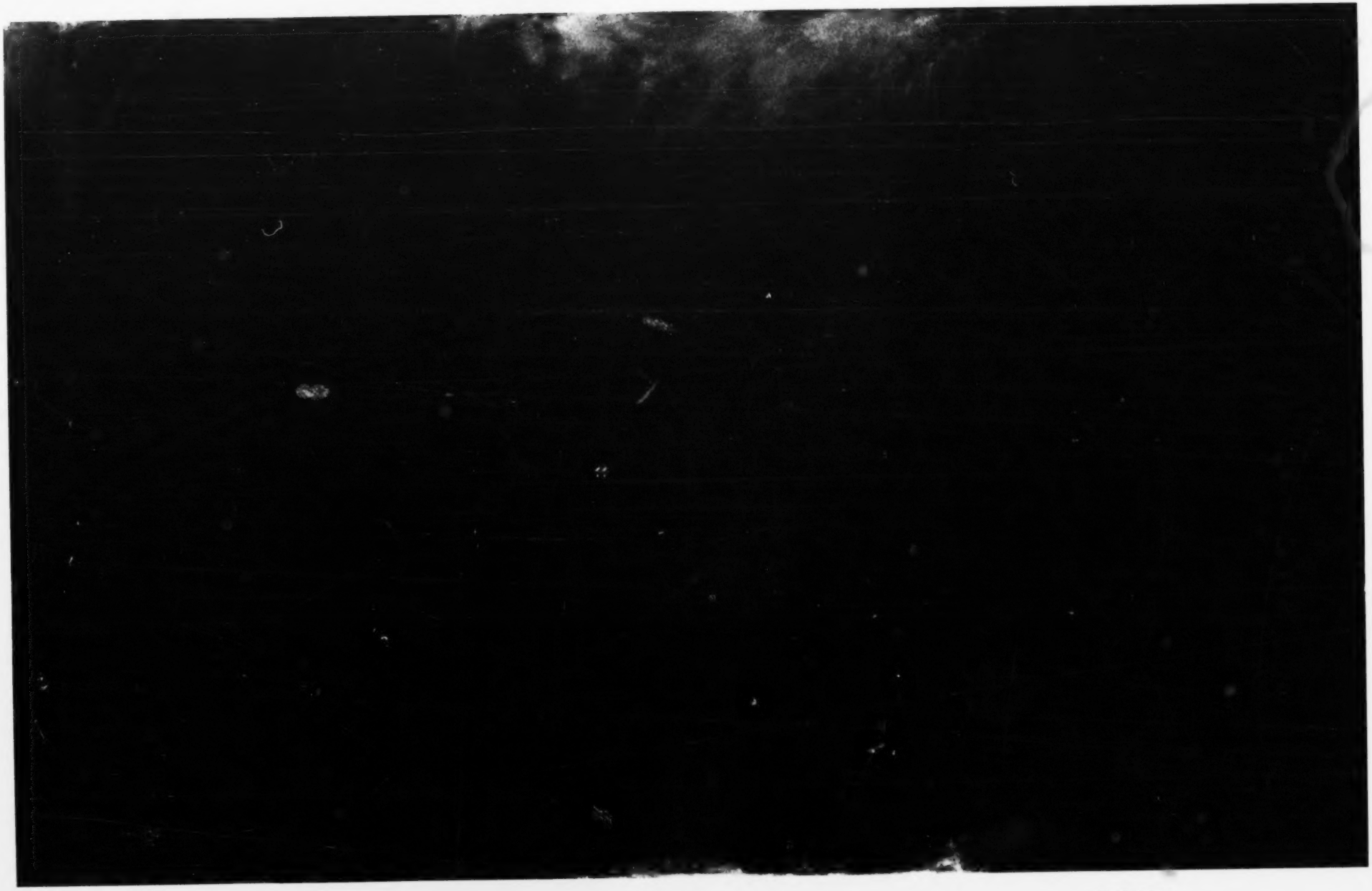


A Long Spring 2006



Red 2006

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Wayne freely admits that his paintings do not always make chromatic sense when placed chronologically side-by-side. Indeed, a red-oriented canvas would be produced simultaneously to a blue one. Perhaps as relief, perhaps as counterpoint, perhaps to avoid boredom, but always to challenge the spatial and optical possibilities of colour in relationship to the history of painting, Wayne's burning concern has been to make hot colours cooperate in cool, thoughtful counterpoint.

Given the decades spent honing his practice, Wayne is a cagey and coy exploiter of colour. For both artists and viewers, colour is personal and emblematic, yet it can also be scientifically submitted to spectral analysis, or loaded with socially conventionalized semiotic codes. It's one of the most potent tools in the artist's kit when constructing meanings, sensations, effects and pure optic pleasure. Wayne's palette is exuberant and pointedly sensorial in evoking visceral emotional responses.

Above 2006

But not completely…

Boucher orchestrates space with colour. It is the lead actor in his theatre, but is not the stage that contains the choreography or the narrative. Boucher speaks of frontal, planar levels of visual experience that also contribute to the construction of deeper, optical space. His colours are never raw, straight-from-the-tube chromatic statements. Instead, he modulates tones and hues, creates veils of colour that float on the optical 'front' of the canvas while alluding to the shallow-to-deep space that anchors them within the frame. Of significance as well is his use of synthetic colours and punchy chemical tones affiliated with Pantone-based industrial spectrums rather than earth colours or those from a 20th Century fine arts palette.

His colour is also not applied to sit flat on the canvas; instead, Boucher's colour fields have shape, dimension, luminosity and pictorial shape. All is calculated, blocked, paced, zoned and committed to final display even when obliterated by subsequent washes of colour. Strong emotional response to colour may be the frontal layer in Boucher's studio practice, but as subject matter it is mostly a flamboyant lead actor who carries the key narrative of the work. It shimmers, glows, and radiates; it fills the stage but does not define the edges, the structures, the templates, the support and directorial order behind its presence.

*****

Pink 2006

There are two predominant production streams in contemporary painting. One begins with the artist's conceptual framework serving as a roadmap that suggests how the 'end product' will read at the completion of the process. The other begins with a blank canvas and the artist's rough idea of a painterly discussion to pursue. The canvas becomes a theatrical space where improvisational painterly actions build to a finale and the finished piece is realized only through the act of painting. The artist functions as a highly rarefied specialist who can only end the process when the painting is 'right' even though words and language are crude and inefficient tools in describing the 'essence' of successful painterly space.

Wayne is often quoted in past interviews about his desire to make a painting 'work.' This appears to align him with the above-mentioned abstractionists who explored painterly options in their day-in, day-out struggle to define a 'good' painting. This also implies that there is no foreseen goal imagined in the 'mind's eye,' just an on-going series of actions and gestures followed by editing and analysis followed by subsequent episodes in the studio to correct, update, improve, advance and overcome the dead zones produced in past studio sessions. Wayne's work has all of the earmarks of the sturm und drang anxiety of the artist in the studio; this seems confirmed by the semi-descriptive titles given to his finished work. Perhaps *Tattoo* refers directly to an image mark on someone's body, or perhaps it speaks more generally to inked zones on translucent epidermis. In the end, his titles may be nothing more than floating signifiers that exist for the sole purpose of catalyzing content and connections for the painting's viewers alone. What is important is Wayne's expressive and emotional pursuits in the space of his canvas.

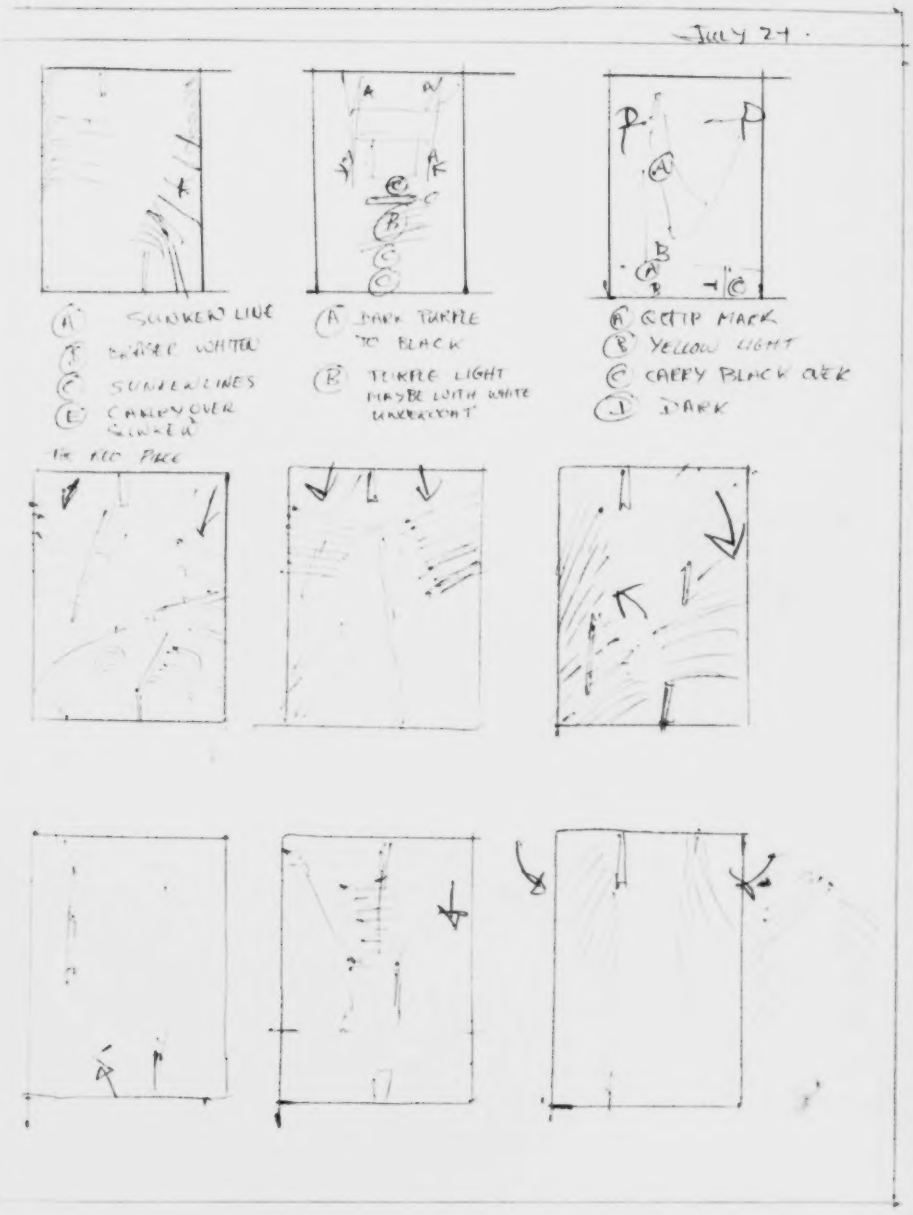
Then again, not really…

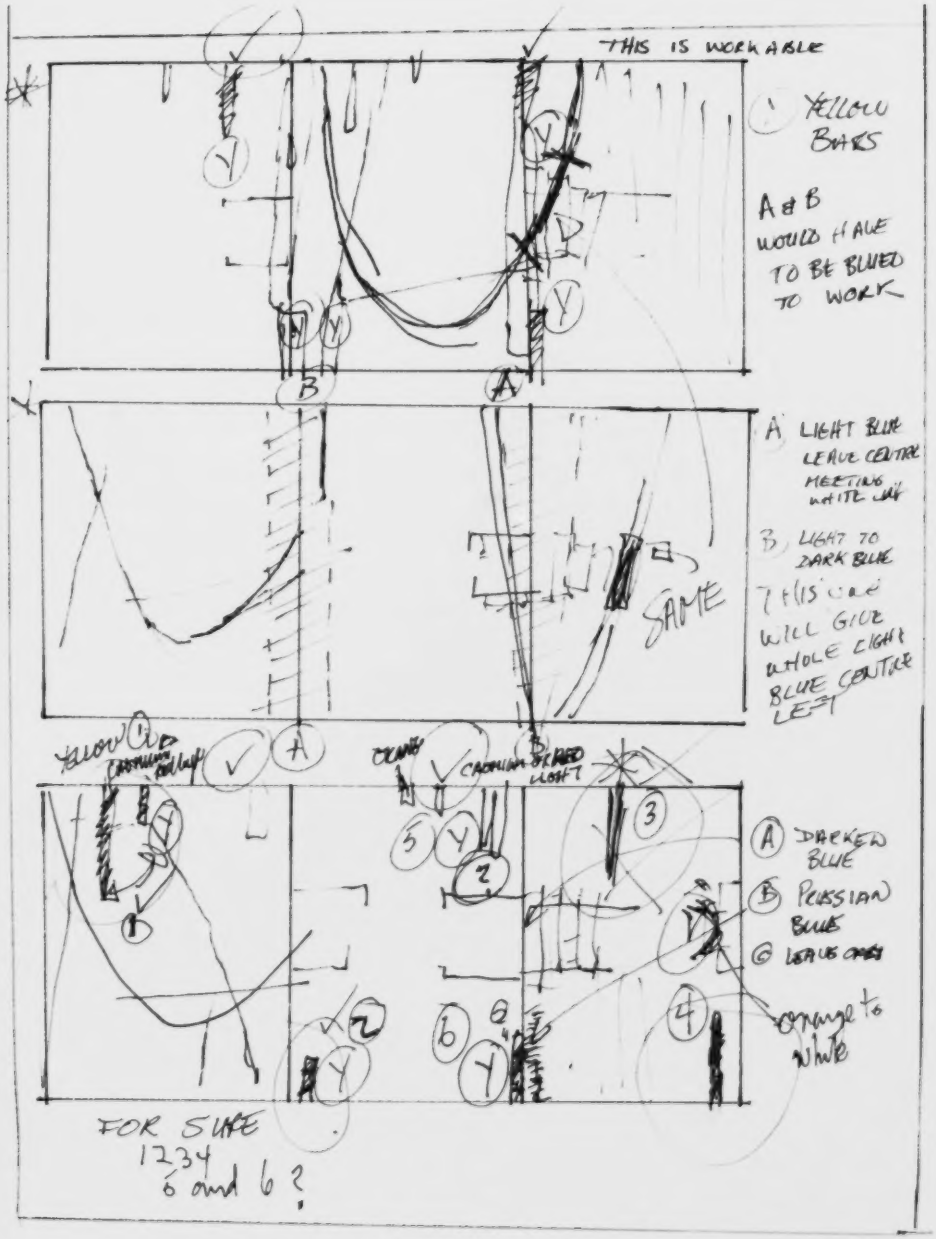
Boucher meticulously plans all of his paintings through a rigorous sketching process in his black, bound, drawing book. Part diary, part sketchpad but fully instrumental as a 'think tablet' for planning his future works, Boucher's drawings recall drafting procedures in other professional practices. Indeed, all pages have ruled edges akin to blueprints and drafting plans. These are then broken up into smaller square cells, often neatly in grids that recall cinematic storyboards or, more telling, choreographer's sketches. Written notes accompany many cells of gestural pen lines and arrows with instructions for bringing colour zones "up" or adding new linear elements that counterpoint existing under-painted grounds. Remarkably, very little of these graphic notes are in colour but reveal instead the architectural blueprint of his paintings.

Boucher, then, is not the emotive artist wildly and intuitively flinging paint about while sopping large zones of canvas with expressionistic colours. If anything, his drawing book reveals a highly organized person who calculates his every move. As with blueprints, storyboards and choreography notes the linear drawings function as shorthand for what will follow in full scale with colour and real-world painting tools. Consider Boucher's book, then, as a compendium of game plans for chess matches where much shrewd thinking precedes the actual moves on the playing boards.

It is also assumed that most studio painters work exclusively with brushes, a tool which is the swishy extension of the human finger. It can generate broad colour washes or surgical marks that are more akin to fat pen lines. Although Boucher uses the brush to rough in most of his colour washes, he also uses large oil bars and 'paints' with an inventive set of tools often not associated with the fine art process. This includes modified industrial and domestic house-painting equipment such as rollers and flat painting pads. Boucher modifies each of these, however, so that they create new textures and marks that are suitable for his purposes. A small roller with flat spots generates erratic paint marks in the course of its journey across the canvas. Painting pads, customized by Boucher, produce streaked linear patterns. Even more fascinating is Boucher's array of scraping and smudging tools. Paint may be applied to the canvas with a brush but flat-edged tools will push it around on the canvas surface creating razor-thin glazes and colour modulations.

Although often used in image construction, digital photography may still be considered an unusual studio production tool in contemporary painting. Boucher, however, uses his digital camera for testing compositional placements of key linear bits or hotspots in zones of painted field. Before fixing a mark or gesture into painterly place, he often plays within the painting frame by attaching surrogate paper 'marks' directly to the canvas; his digital records serve to compare an array of different location points. The camera becomes an active participant in the compositional phase and demystifies old romantic tales about the artist as emotive genius who naturally intuits where visual components are located within a compositional frame.




THIS IS WORKABLE
YELLOW BASES
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A LIGHT BLUE LEAVE CENTRE MEETING WHITE
B LIGHT TO DARK BLUE
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SAME
A DARKER BLUE
B PRUSSIAN BLUE
FOR SURE 1234 5 and 6 ?

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Radiance and Counterpoint

Boucher's practice, then, is defined by sophisticated balancing acts of graphic and painterly vocabularies. Early work was black and white and when colour entered the picture after 1991 so did references to fences, ladders, swimming pools or dock structures that thrust into the centre of the work as part image, part graphic gesture. Other paintings had two-colour, hard edge flat zones that mimicked semaphore flags and life rafts that hung off of the edges or infiltrated the centre zones of the painting.

These devices flip-flopped between being subject matter and framing components essential in structuring the space. This is the game for Boucher where he constructs a harmonious spatial playing field—not a colour-field—with richly chromatic zones, linear gestures, textural tracings, physical paint application and optical depth all played out within the framed field of a canvas.

But there is always the edge of the canvas, the proscenium of the stage to negotiate. What focuses Boucher's gestures are the end zones where his brushes, rollers, scrapers run off into the void. Or where his painterly gestures respect the edges, veer off and are contained within the central zone of the canvas.

Radiance, therefore, is manifest in the story of colour and light; counterpoint is found in the structural information that defines the stage of activity. The subject matter of Boucher's paintings, then, is the spatial drama that is played out within the physical frame.

Based on conversations with Boucher, the following spatial paradigms emerged as entry points into a deeper comprehension of his studio practice. It is important, however, to consider that these models function as textual parables alluded to through Boucher's painting projects. These are the collective 'somethings' that his work suggests but no single example is intended to illustrate exclusively a single narrative in his work. Instead Boucher navigates the inter-tidal waters of formal modernism and imagistic postmodernism where the salty meets the fresh, where pseudo-images are red herrings in formal constructions and evocative paintings can still be analyzed by the tools used in their trade.

Coastlines and landscape from 35,000 feet at night: Everything is perceived differently from airplanes and landscape does not present itself with the orderliness of maps complete with northward-pointing compass-roses. Watery zones are dark and void of colour and line; towns are strange pools of light, roadways spidery tentacles. Leaving the human scale of space on the ground, air travel provides a destabilizing and abstracting experience the farther one gets away from the earth.

Illuminated fog: When hot and humid air settles in the coastal harbours, the sun may strengthen in intensity but will not become visible. Instead, it supercharges fog banks and causes them to glow seemingly from within. Fog, which normally flattens spatial experience, illuminates itself instead, creating strange but shallow three-dimensional space that is physically close at hand but also cloaks the big picture. The radiant glow within many of Boucher's paintings play with light and colour as chief organizer of spatial experience.

Windows and monitors: An architectural window frames a view into the landscape and can focus on the visual space contained within the view. The landscape, however, is stable with a fixed horizon line. Consider the computer and video monitor 'window' of contemporary digital culture. The view through this window is never fixed; it scrolls, fades, overlaps, dissolves, explodes and zooms about. Following the postmodern experience, painters often view the optical phenomenon within the monitor space as unfixed and a mere sample of a meta-narrative that is expanding within the ether outside of the frame.

Skin and x-rays: Think of a tent illuminated at night from within. The tent poles and support structures are thoroughly visible within the canvas silhouette. The same holds true for the white of bones in traditional x-rays. The topography of skin is readily available to the naked eye; the x-ray provides the underlying story and drama. Boucher's radiant colourfields are especially meaningful when structural support and armature is part of the underlying picture. The elegance, however, is supercharged when slender, curving lines hold in place masses of colourful, modulating painted fields.

The surface and the sandbar: Viewed obliquely from the shore, the sandbar is not visible in choppy waters due to serious surface activity. When viewed from above, the sandbar is visible as an underlying structural mass animated but not obliterated by wave action. Consider Boucher's final, textural washes of colour in a painting as the wave chop in this picture, something that adds atmosphere to colour zones without challenging its underlying principles for appearing within the frame.

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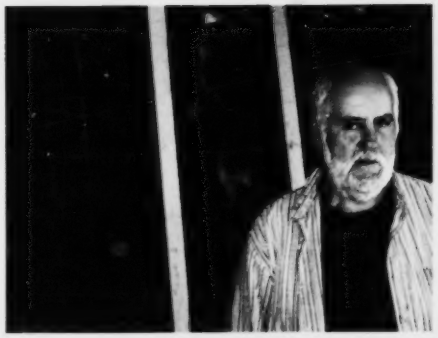
Boucher is neither a conceptually driven systems-painter nor an emotive abstractionist. Nor is he an evocative landscape painter or a dreamy symbolist generating linguistically oriented visual glyphs. He is truly a painter who hybridizes and synthesizes existing strategies and plays with the best of historical and contemporary traditions. Out of this comes works of art that look like the products of one practice but reveal thinking linked to those in another. This way Boucher bridges a half-century of abstract painting into his own hybrid practice.

In Western culture, iconoclastic heroes are often pegged as the devil-may-care innovators who forge into new territory through rugged gumption and chutzpah. The quiet synthesizers who fuse the modern with the postmodern, the brush with the pixel, and splashy paint applications informed by savvy design are not as quickly celebrated. But they bring forward the best thoughtful consideration of what has historically passed and what can still be accomplished in the future. Wayne Boucher's paintings represent the best of all of the above worlds.

— PETER DYKHUIS

Biography



Wayne Boucher studied at the Banff Centre, Alberta, and at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, receiving his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1975. The following year he moved to Graywood, Annapolis County, Nova Scotia where he continues his painting practice.

Boucher's solo professional exhibition record spans the past three past decades with key projects mounted in the following selected public and private galleries:

- Gallery Page and Strange, Halifax, Nova Scotia (2006)
- Galerie Georges Goguen, Moncton, New Brunswick (2006)
- Agnes Bugera Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta (2003)
- ARTsPLACE, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia (2002, 1999, 1995)
- ArtZone, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (2002)
- I-Land Gallery, Toronto, Ontario (2000)
- James Baird Gallery, St. John's, Newfoundland (2000, 1997)
- Studio 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia (1998, 1984)
- Acadia University Art Gallery, Wolfville, Nova Scotia (1996, 1983)
- Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia (1996)
- Lunenburg Art Gallery, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia (1996)
- Alexander Gallery, Toronto, Ontario (1994)
- King's Theatre, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia (1994)
- Market House Gallery, Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia (1992)
- Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia (1986) touring to:
  - Petro Canada Gallery, Calgary, Alberta
  - Centennial Art Gallery, Oakville, Ontario
  - Centre Culturel de l' Universite de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, Quebec
  - University College of Cape Breton Art Gallery, Sydney, Nova Scotia
  - Acadia University Art Gallery, Wolfville, Nova Scotia
- McMaster University Art Gallery, Hamilton, Ontario (1984)
- Eye Level Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia (1977)

Included in countless regional exhibitions, highlights from his national and international record of two-person and group exhibitions are:

- Ingrid Mueller Fine Arts, Fredericton, New Brunswick (2006)
- Lonsdale Gallery, Toronto, Ontario (2006)
- Karlsrhule International Art Fair, Schrade Gallery, Karlsrhule, Germany (2006)
- Deutsch Warkstaetten Hellerau, Dresden, Germany (2006)
- Schloss Mochenthal, Ehingen, Germany (2006)
- Agnes Bugera Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta (2005)
- Secord Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia (2004)
- I-Land Gallery, Toronto, Ontario (2001)
- Eye Level Gallery: CAPS for HX: Halifax Exhibition of Contemporary Art, Halifax, Nova Scotia (2000)
- Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia (1998, 1987)
- Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia (1998, 1996, 1980, 1979)
- Sir Wilfred Grenfell College Art Gallery, Cornerbrook, Newfoundland (1998)
- Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's, Newfoundland (1997)
- St. Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia (1995, 1989)
- Glendon College Art Gallery, York University, Toronto, Ontario (1990)
- Albert White Gallery, Toronto, Ontario (1984)

The recipient of numerous grants from provincial and federal agencies including a Canada Council Established Artist Grant in 2001, other key professional successes include winning the 2004 juried competition to execute the mural entitled *Réveil* for the new Interpretation Centre at Grand-Pré National Historic Site that marks the 18th Century Acadian Deportation. Boucher was also invited to become a member of the Royal Canadian Academy in 2002. Other active memberships include the Canadian Artists Representation, Visual Arts Nova Scotia and Arms Length Funding for the Arts. Boucher is a founding member and past chair of the Annapolis Region Community Arts Council and presently on the Exhibitions Committee of the artist-run centre ARTsPLACE as well as the Advisory/Selection Committee, Artist in Residence Program, Memory Clinic, Queen Elizabeth II Hospital, in Halifax. He is also on the Board of Directors of the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia Arts Award Foundation 2005-2006.

List of Work in Exhibition

Measurements in centimetres,
height precedes width.
All works are collection of the artist
unless otherwise noted.

(blues)

Blue Rising 2002
oil on canvas
182.9 x 152.4
collection of Margaret and David Fountain, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Fall 2003
oil on canvas
195.6 x 195.6

Tattoo 2005
oil on canvas
106.7 x 106.7

Below 2006
oil on canvas
122.0 x 122.0

Blue 2006
oil on canvas
213.5 x 304.8

Fandango 2006
oil on canvas
195.6 x 304.8

(greens)

Gou Gou 2005
oil on canvas
116.8 x 88.9
collection of Margaret and David Fountain, Halifax, Nova Scotia

A Long Spring 2006
oil on canvas
195.6 x 365.8

Shelter 2006
oil on canvas
195.6 x 243.8

(reds)

Greenedge 2002
oil on canvas
116.8 x 134.6

Cotton Candy 2005
oil on canvas
106.8 x 116.8
collection of Marilyn and Brian Mackay-Lyons, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Above 2006
oil on canvas
122.0 x 122.0

Bygone 2006
oil on canvas
106.7 x 106.7
collection of Shirley Blayney and David Christianson, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

Pink 2006
oil on canvas
91.4 x 91.4

Red 2006
oil on canvas
195.6 x 304.8

(yellows)

Between 2006
oil on canvas
122.0 x 122.0

Yellow 2006
oil on canvas
195.6 x 365.8

Wayne Boucher: Radiance and Counterpoint

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Curated by Peter Dykhuis

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NOVA SCOTIA
Tourism, Culture and Heritage

Front cover:
Wayne Boucher, Blue (detail) 2006, oil on canvas, 213.5 x 304.8 cm